

NOV 12 2003

Superior Clipping Service

Glendive MT 406-377-6612

Skramstad pleased with cleanup, concerned about funding cutbacks

By ROGER MORRIS

Western News Publisher

Les Skramstad has been as critical as anyone about the Environmental Protection Agency's cleanup efforts in the Libby area but he appreciates the good job on the cleanup of his personal residence and property.

Skramstad participated in the effort to bring the EPA to Libby to clean up asbestos-contaminated vermiculite left behind by W.R. Grace after it shut down its mining and milling operations in the early 1990s. And he played a big role in getting Gov. Judy Martz to support a Superfund listing for Libby, and to use the state's lone "Silver Bullet" requiring a quick, priority listing with the cleanup to be done within a three-year time period. That was December 2001.

The lanky former employee of the Zonolite Co., Grace's predecessor, is no stranger in the EPA's downtown Libby office where he has sought information and questions cleanup efforts.

But overall, he is satisfied with the job the EPA and Environmental Restoration specifically did on his south Libby home.

"I have nothing but good to say about Tommy Cook and all the people who worked out there," Skramstad said. "I feel like they bent over backwards to help us."

Not everything was resolved to Skramstad's satisfaction and he hopes there is further discussion.

The EPA decided that vermiculite in the soil beneath his house in the crawlspace would remain. It was tested but came back non-detect for asbestos fibers.

"If you came out today and wanted to buy my house, I'd have to tell you it's there," he said.

While there are no federal or state laws requiring such disclosure, Skramstad said every homeowner has a moral duty to do so.

The second concern was the carpet in Skramstad's home was not replaced through the cleanup.

Instead the EPA proposed using vacuums on the carpets. The Skramstads' concern is that the family had tracked contaminated soil into the house from the yard, which had to be cleaned.

"They told us they don't replace carpet, which I think defeats the purpose of the cleanup," he said. "I asked them to take out the carpet and look to see if the pad or floor underneath had asbestos particles. Then we can negotiate."

Skramstad said the cleanup crew cut the carpet out in pieces and hauled it away for disposal without finding anything underneath.

"In my way of thinking, there went the evidence," he said.

Before he moved back into the house, he and his wife

Norita ordered new carpet. In negotiations on the carpet, Skramstad said he had only been asking for 50 percent of the cost since the carpet wasn't new.

"The jury is still out and it seems like they're holding tight to not replacing it," Skramstad said.

A larger concern is the shrinking funds for the Libby cleanup and what it means to getting the effort done quickly.

"It's really going to raise hell with the cleanup," he said. "I really feel if everyone got behind this, it would move along faster and better."

He said like it or not the problem is here and needs to be cleaned.

"Everything we do is a plus, better than it was," he said. "I'd like everybody to wake up and smell the coffee and push in the same direction."

Despite his differences with the EPA on his own home's cleanup, Skramstad wanted to let people know he was dealt with fairly and not because he has made noise in the past.

"I can't help feel they did a great job for us and I've talked to people down the road and they were pleased too," he said.